



State of Connecticut  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



Commission on Children

Testimony of Elaine Zimmerman  
Executive Director  
Connecticut Commission on Children

Select Committee on Children  
Connecticut General Assembly  
March 2, 2010

Senator Musto, Representative Urban and Members of the Committee:

Enclosed please find comments in support of R.B. 292, An Act Concerning Homeless Youth and R.B. 5313, An Act Concerning Visitation by Grandparents.

**R.B. 292, An Act Concerning Homeless Youth**

The current recession is manifesting profound impact on children and youth in our state. 25% of those using food pantries are working but do not have enough money for all the family expenses. There has been an increase in domestic violence from family stressors as well as an increase in homelessness. Unemployment is high and many families are without resources.

Hunger is growing. More teachers are describing children and youth coming to school, clearly without dinner or breakfast. Families are living in cars quietly to try to get by while looking for work. Youth are describing stress due to their parent or parents having lost jobs. Some no longer believe they will be able to attend college. More youth are dropping out of college to help their families financially.

An increase in youth runaways reveals youth leaving home to relieve the family of the financial burden. Others are leaving because the family stress has pushed an emotional lever that is no longer tolerable. Once youth are homeless, there are few places to land. Most shelters will not take in youth without the parent. What may have been well-intentioned becomes a further spiraling out of control for the youth.

R.B. 292 puts into place the protections and interventions necessary to help the teen. This is a potentially strong statute to address an emergency situation for teens that will only worsen. It is also possible that federal funds could assist in such program development.

We recommend passage of R.B. 292, An Act Concerning Homeless Youth.

### **R.B. 5313, An Act Concerning Visitation by Grandparents**

Of most importance to children in any shift in family structure are stability and the constancy of parental love. Parents take priority over grandparents in both constitutional rights and the ego development and long-term developmental needs of the child or youth.

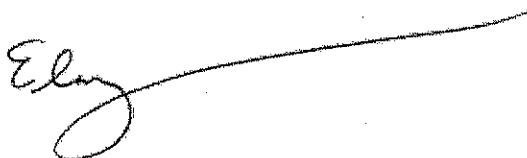
However, grandparents are sometimes ignored when a divorce, death, drug addiction or criminal conviction occur. The omission of the grandparent at this point is all the more detrimental to the child as there has already been one loss of a parent, temporary or not.

Children suffer when they lose the intergenerational connection with grandparents if they have had a true and deep relationship with the grandmother or grandfather. When a child loses a grandparent during a death of a parent, criminal conviction, drug or alcohol abuse, or divorce—simply because the other parent or adults involved neglect to bring in the elder, this harms the child.

Sometimes the parent responsible for the child is just not thinking straight due to the crisis or change in life. Sometimes the parent is 'acting out' to expunge the memory of the lost or disconnected partner. This harms the child. In other cases, it is an agency with authority who ignores the grandparent. This also harms the child.

R.B. 5313 is carefully crafted with attention to the needs of the child and current constitutional arguments on the issue. We recommend its passage.

Respectfully submitted.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Elaine', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Elaine Zimmerman  
Executive Director  
CT Commission on Children